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The Papers read were—

1. *Exploration of Central Australia.* By J. MACDOUALL STUART, F.R.G.S., and Gold Medallist.

MR. STUART left Chambers' Creek on the 1st of January, 1861, with eleven men and forty-nine horses. The first part of his journey was tedious and difficult, owing to the dryness of the country, of which he complains severely. He says, at the Finke's Springs on March 3rd, "I am now in daily expectation of the equinoctial rains, and then I hope to be enabled to push on without further loss of time. The last month has been dreadful slow work; but it has proved the country passable at any season." The first shower fell on March 16th, at the Hugh Springs, and on the 20th his party began to be embarrassed by heavy rains and the consequent boggi-ness of the ground. He passed Mount Centre on the 6th of April, and reached Attack Creek (the place where he was attacked and repulsed by the natives in his previous journey) on the 25th of April: thenceforward his exploration of new country fairly commenced.

On the 29th of April he arrived at a fine grassy creek with abundance of water, which he called Tomkinson Creek. It formed a station, whence he subsequently made three attempts, in different directions, to reach the northern coast, and where, on the present occasion, he left two of his tired horses to recruit, until the time of his homeward journey.

Four days of travel onwards, brought him to the commencement of large open plains, stretching out of sight to the north, and bounded on the east by a ridge of hills, running also to the north-

ward. The former of these he called Sturt's Plains, after his old-leader in Australian exploration, and the latter Ashburton Range, after the President of the Royal Geographical Society. It was at this point of his journey where all his difficulties commenced.

The plains were fissured and water-worn by long previous inundations, but now matted over with thick grass, which concealed the crevices and made them exceedingly dangerous to the horses to cross. There was not the slightest appearance of surface-water. He afterwards mentions his belief that Sturt's Plains are a continuation of some he had met with beyond Mount Centre, and that they might continue to the banks of the Victoria River, the features of the country being nearly the same.

He therefore travelled to Ashburton Range and ascended it, in order to gain a view of the country before him. To the north lay an extensive open plain, with scarcely a tree on it, and no distant hills were visible, where water might be expected, except some slightly rising ground in the north-west: to which, on the second day after his return to camp, he made his way.

He reached it after a difficult and toilsome journey. The horses were constantly falling into the fissures before mentioned, which were concealed by grass, at great risk of serious accident. On arriving he found it to be the bank of a former fresh-water lake, now wholly dried: numbers of old shells lay about it, worn to the thinness of paper by the combined action of the sun and atmosphere. There was not the slightest indication of water in its neighbourhood, nor anything visible in the distance to hold out hope, excepting one hill-top, too far away in the west for him to attempt; so he was compelled to turn back to the watering-place he had last left. He thence started afresh in a westerly direction, straight towards the hill-top he had observed from the bank of the dried-up lake. He reached it, and found it to consist of red, waterless sand-hills, 200 feet high, and thickly covered with scrub. The view from their top was exceedingly discouraging. He could see for fully twenty-five miles a-head, and there was no appearance of a change, while entire want of water compelled him to return without delay.

For the third time he started on an altered course, now making directly for the north, over stony and sandy rises, very thick with scrub and trees, and discovered water on May 14th in what he called Lawson Creek, in lat. $17^{\circ} 15'$; whence he had hopes of out-flanking the range of sand-hills reached on his previous journey; and of thus reaching the Victoria by a more northern parallel. He was, however, disappointed in his end, for, on travelling to the

west, he came amongst stony rises, covered with scrub so dense that it was impossible to penetrate it. It was the thickest scrub he had ever had to contend against; the horses would not face it, and he was in danger of losing them, for, even at two or three yards' distance, they were wholly screened from sight. His hands and face were lacerated, his clothes and saddle-bags torn to pieces. If the party had gone further they would have lost everything off the horses.

These scrub-covered ridges on the one hand, and the fissured waterless plains on the other, placed a bar to further progress to the north-west; that is to say, in the direction of the Victoria River. They were, as Mr. Stuart says, as complete an impediment as if an inland sea or a wall had been in his way.

Returning to Lawson's Creek, he now made a fourth attempt, but in this case to the north-east, in the direction of Carpentaria. However, he was repulsed by a continuation of the waterless Sturt's Plains, to the aridity of which was superadded the further difficulty of belts of nearly impassable forest.

A fifth attempt to the westward of north, on May 24th, was, in the first instance, much more promising. At a distance of only 14 miles from Lawson's Creek he fell upon a splendid creek of water, in lat. $17^{\circ} 30'$, and long. $133^{\circ} 41'$. He saw a large flock of pelicans, and there were mussels and periwinkles in the water, of which the natives must consume a large quantity, judging from the shells on the banks. He called it Newcastle Water, and says it is certainly the gem of Sturt's Plains.

The lagoon proved to be above 9 miles long, 150 yards wide, and 17 feet deep in the middle. It ended towards the north-east in a chain of ponds. Here he was attacked by natives, whom he repelled. He examined the neighbourhood of this water, and on the 30th of May reached even to within 100 miles of Mr. Gregory's last station on the Camfield, but was turned back as before, by the fearfully dense scrub and the want of water.

Again he started from Newcastle Water on the 10th of June, and came on a still thicker scrub than on the former occasion. There was not the least appearance of rising ground, or a change in the country; nothing but the same dreary, dismal forest throughout, which, he says, may in all probability continue to Mr. Gregory's last camp on the Camfield.

He would have dug wells had his party been large enough, when divided into sections, to resist native attacks, and had he possessed means of conveying water to those who would be engaged in sinking the wells. He had not the least doubt but that water could

be obtained at a moderate depth, and believed that three or four wells would suffice to carry a party through to the sources of the Camfield.

Lastly, his rations being reduced to four pounds of flour and one pound of dried meat per man per week, he made a push from Newcastle Water, across Sturt's Plains, eastwards towards Carpentaria, but was again driven back by want of water. The ground was dark and dusty, and had wholly swallowed the rain that had fallen upon it.

Mr. Stuart then fell back several stages to Tomkinson Creek, and expended his last efforts in two vain expeditions—one towards the Victoria, where he met with no scrub of serious thickness, but was repulsed by want of water; the second towards Carpentaria, over plains like Sturt's Plains, and equally impracticable for want of water; and the third towards the Victoria River. Finally, on July 12th, he returned towards Adelaide, with exhausted horses and a bare sufficiency of food.

2. *Letters from the Governor of West Australia and the Bishop of Perth, accompanying the Journal of an Expedition undertaken by the Brothers DEMPSTER, Messrs. CLARKSON and HARPER.*

His Excellency's letter is as follows:—

“ I ENCLOSE the journal of a small affair undertaken by some young gentlemen who have been my companions in kangaroo-hunting. From a local point of view their discovery is highly interesting, inasmuch as it was believed to be impossible to penetrate far to the northward and eastward of the settled districts of ‘Northam,’ by reason of dense thickets, which turned Mr. Roe back many years ago. This expedition is, I hope, the forerunner of other and more important discoveries in the same direction; and care will be in future taken to send some scientific observers with the party, which I regret was not the case in the late instance.

“ You will observe that the information relative to white men having perished in this locality ten or twelve years ago, is very loose and unreliable. I have questioned the explorers, who can add nothing to what they have stated in their journal, namely, native *hearsay*. The alleged fact of their having horses proves that they could not have been shipwrecked sailors, and I think it highly improbable that any of Leichhardt's party could have reached such a point.

“ I begin to look for some tidings of Mr. Frank Gregory's expe-